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When a Photograph of Trees Is Almost like a Crime

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‘Think before taking the photograph,
while taking the photograph,
and after taking the photograph!’[1]

1 In 1927, the Russian artist and photographer Alexander Rodchenko spent several days at Vladiir Mayakovsky’s dacha,[2] taking, what were for him, rare trips into the countryside, and then noted in his journal: ‘In Pushkino, at the dacha, I walk around and look at nature: there’s a bush, there’s a tree, here’s a ravine, stinging nettle ... Everything’s accidental and unorganized, there’s nothing to photograph, it’s not interesting. Now the pines aren’t too bad, long, bare, almost telegraph poles.’[3]

2 To the city dweller Rodchenko, nature seemed to be a disorganized chaos with no artistic appeal, an informal and unstructured accumulation of thicket and undergrowth. The only thing that interested him was the pine trees, no doubt because they already evoked a potential industrial use.[4] His conception of nature was subordinate to the primacy of technology and the vision of the technological construction of a new society and a new human being.[5] In spite of this, Rodchenko produced and published a series of photographs of pine trees (*figs. 1 and 10*), together with his diary entry, in the journal *Novy LEF*.[6] He was a member of *LEF* editorial staff between 1923 and 1925 and, from 1926 to 1929, he was in charge of the column ‘Photographs and the Cinema’ of *Sovetkoe Kino* where he published works by Moholy-Nagy, Mendelsohn, and others.[7]

3 Despite its seemingly innocent and unprovocative subject, these photographs were soon to develop a history. In April 1928 – Stalin had just proclaimed the first Five-Year Plan, whose motto was ‘Technology decides everything’ – *Sovetskoe Foto* published an anonymous attack on Rodchenko, accusing him of plagiarism and formalism and citing the pine tree photograph as an example. Rodchenko, his friend Boris Kushner, and finally the constructivist writer and playwright Sergei Tretyakov took up the gauntlet, and a

heated debate ensued that revolved around nothing less than art's mission in modern society and the possibility of practicing it publicly.[8] Suddenly, the pine trees became political.

4 The charge that Rodchenko had plagiarized Western formalism was intended as a twofold repudiation. The article maintained that Rodchenko's proclaimed photographic revolution was already common currency in bourgeois Europe, a claim it attempted to substantiate by pointing to the visual evidence of accompanying photographs by Albert Renger-Patzsch and others. Moreover, it claimed, Rodchenko's photographs betrayed the revolution in favor of a purely formal contemplation of reality. Thus, they claimed, Rodchenko produced copies of empty forms without content.

5 The article attempted to illustrate this charge by means of a visual juxtaposition, with three of Rodchenko's photographs – including one from the pine tree series – printed on the right-hand page, and three others facing it, one each by Renger-Patzsch, Moholy-Nagy, and Marten. The pine tree image was suggestively compared to a picture of a chimney by Renger-Patzsch, an exponent of the 'new objectivity,' with the result that Rodchenko's comparison of the trees to telegraph poles was heightened even further (*fig. 2*). The intention of the juxtaposition, however, was to show that in Rodchenko's works form had already triumphed over content, and that their content was therefore arbitrary, interchangeable, and empty of (social) significance.

6 In the ensuing debate, Rodchenko was further accused of turning his birds- and worms-eye views into a *personal* style, for which his opponents coined the term 'Rodchenko types.'[9] They claimed Rodchenko's view had merely replaced the dominant way of seeing, a way criticized by Rodchenko, with a new one that was equally dominant and similarly regimenting in its effect. *Sovetskoe Foto* also published a caricature that explicitly referred to his photographs of pine trees, which were clearly perceived as typical of his photography as a whole. In fact, it is one of the bitter ironies of history that this accusation of plagiarism came just at the time when Rodchenko's photographs were beginning to be widely emulated, even within 'official' Russian photography.[10] What Rodchenko's opponents were criticizing him for doing was at that very moment taking hold as a style within the official aesthetic.

7 Rodchenko responded to the accusation of plagiarism with an open letter in which he adopted the methods of his critics and selected four photographs – by Arkady Shaykhet, Semyon Fridlyand, and Vitali Zhemchuzhny – in an effort to show that similar compositions were a result of universal visual phenomena as well as a natural consequence of imitation, which he described as a necessary and essential aspect of art. The visual effect was just as compelling as his critics' demonstration had been.[11] Rodchenko's attempt to have his open letter published in *Sovetskoe Foto* failed, but *Novy LEF* proved willing to print the reply, where it appeared in 1928 with the ironic title 'Large-Scale Illiteracy or Dirty Little Tricks?' The thrust of Rodchenko's argument was that the similarity was actually intentional, since both he and Renger-Patzsch wanted to effect a revolution in vision and that revolution expressed itself in new ways of seeing: 'Renger-Patzsch's *Chimney* and my *Tree*, shot from the bottom up, are indeed very similar, but could it be that it isn't clear to "photographers" and the editorial staff that this similarity was deliberate on my part? Painters conventionally rendered trees straightforwardly from a standing position as if "seen from the level of their belly buttons" for hundreds of years, and the photographers followed them. If I photograph a

tree from the bottom up and it resembles an industrial object, a chimney, that's a revolution in the eyes of philistines and lovers of old landscape paintings.'[12]

8 For Rodchenko, it was photography's task to spark a genuine revolution in perception that would then be followed by a revolution in thinking and the construction of a new human being. According to this program, photography had the power to tear the veil of tradition from humanity's eyes and lead it to a new, unfeigned, and liberated way of seeing. In formulating a program like this, Rodchenko was actually following what was very much an official line, since one of the primary tasks of the photography journals was to enlighten the people and promote literacy. *Sovetskoe Foto* had been directly established by Narkompros, the People's Commissariat for Enlightenment, and its official goal was to disseminate revolutionary amateur photography through outstanding examples. According to Rodchenko's programmatic formulation, 'the camera lens is the pupil of the cultivated person in socialist society.'[13]

9 While the accusation of plagiarism had no immediate concrete consequences, it was not long before it was leveled again, this time with more tangible repercussions. On January 25, 1932, Rodchenko was expelled from the artist's association 'Oktyabr,' of which he was one of the founders, charged with 'propagating a taste that is alien to the proletariat' by steering 'proletarian art onto the path toward Western advertising, formalism, and aestheticism.'[14] He had already distanced himself from 'revolutionary formalism' in 1931, and had been playing only a marginal role in Russian cultural life since the beginning of the 1930s, and his works – and the works of many others – were subject to state censorship.[15] However, the story of Rodchenko's photographs of pine trees was far from over – in fact, it was just beginning. Rodchenko's visual revolution continued, not only in the official aesthetic, but also in film, where it took the form of an implicit political commentary. The gaze up into the branches of the pine trees now became a paradoxical forward look back, a reflection on the political as well as aesthetic revolution and its consequences.

> 'And our film is about Lenin.
> Here above all
> we must be especially principled.'[16]

10 For the tenth anniversary of Lenin's death, Dziga Vertov shot his *Three Songs about Lenin*, a commissioned film that received advance screenings in 1934 at the Writers Congress in Moscow, and the second Venice Film Festival, before being distributed to movie theaters in November of that same year. As Annette Michelson has emphasized, it was the only one of Vertov's films that 'received immediate, unanimous, and lasting approval.'[17] That may be partly because it represented a 'monument of cinematic hagiography,'[18] and also because it made use of a large quantity of documentary material. Vertov himself underscored the extraordinary complexity of the research and the editing work that went into the making of the film.[19]

11 *Three Songs about Lenin* is a film with a prologue and three main sections. All three sections are based on folk songs from East Asian countries, but visualized in very different ways. The first film highlights the effects of the Russian Revolution on everyday life in East Asia. 'My Face Was in a Dark Prison' is first of all a reference to the chador, which women were then able to remove in the workers associations. Metaphorically, however, it is also a play on the (political, economic, etc.) transition from darkness to light, from illiteracy to the enlightenment of reading, from pure handicrafts to industrial production and electricity. The second song, by contrast – 'We Loved Him' – makes

extensive use of film and sound documents of Lenin. The third part, which is the most typical of Vertov's work, is entitled 'In the Great City of Stone' and focuses on the revolution in technology and labor.

12 Vertov himself has characterized the film as three different documents in one. *Three Songs about Lenin* is first of all a document of Lenin's death and the journey of his coffin from Gorky to Moscow. Second, it documents the available film footage of Lenin.[20] Finally, it is a document of the historical, political, and economic revolution that Lenin ushered in.[21]

13 After the trial screenings, where Vertov asked the 'Japanese, Americans, and English' in the audience to tell him what parts of the film they had trouble understanding, he noted with some surprise that his film was comprehensible 'without words.'[22] Additional test screenings made it clear 'that the exposition of *Three Songs* develops not through the channel of words, but through other channels.'[23] The suggestive power of the film's composition and the montage techniques that Vertov had developed were aimed at bringing about a kind of thought transference or telepathy.[24] This also incorporated the reflexological theories of Wladimir Michailowitsch Bechterev and Ivan Petrovich Pavlov and sought to employ montage as a kind of visual conditioning.[25] Vertov's documentary attempted to provoke the formation of particular interpretations and reactions in the viewer: 'Thoughts fly out from the screen, entering without verbal translations into the viewer's consciousness.'[26] Thus, the *Songs* were not just documents, but – as Vertov put it – 'documentary weapons'[27] that sought to put Lenin's programmatic functionalization of film as a propaganda instrument into practice.[28]

14 Vertov's theoretical, political, and aesthetic positions are very close to Rodchenko's. The two were friends, and it was for Vertov's film *Kino-Eye* that Rodchenko designed his first movie posters, which look like 'a kind of typographic filmstrip'[29] and seek to express in the medium of typography the two artists' shared commitment to a perceptual revolution.[30] But they also endured similar fates (as did many other artists of the time, including Michail Afanasjewitsch Bulgakov, Anna Akhmatova, and Marina Tsvetaeva). Although they escaped the Stalinist purges, they had a very hard time getting contracts and commissions and working publicly.

15 Vertov's subtle montage technique can already be seen in the prologue to *Three Songs about Lenin*. The prologue opens with a shot that is so similar to one of the photographs from Rodchenko's pine tree series that it might be mistaken for it (*figs. 6 and 7*). The prologue has a strictly symmetrical structure. It begins and ends with the visual citation of Rodchenko. In the middle stands the famous photograph of Lenin from early August 1922, which shows him sitting on the park bench at his house in Gorky (*fig. 5*).[31] By the fact that, in a film about Lenin, Vertov includes a reference to Rodchenko's controversial photographs of pine trees and even goes so far as to emphasize that reference by using the photographs twice to frame the entire opening sequence, Vertov *documents* (in this documentary) an aesthetico-political position and makes it possible to decipher his dual support for Lenin *and* for a visual revolution through film and photography. The aesthetic revolution becomes visible as an aspect of Lenin's political revolution: it becomes a politics of the image. And that, in turn – because of the help of the visual quotation – becomes programmatically recognizable as an explicit reference to Rodchenko. *Three Songs about Lenin* turns out to be a pointed instance of the politics of image and montage as well as a visual memory bank and a mnemonic pictorial archive.

16 Next in the prologue, the 'camera eye' makes its way into the room where Lenin died and looks out at the park and the empty bench where Lenin sat in the famous photograph. It then follows the journey back through the park, into the house, to the trees – and the three songs begin.

> 'What kind of times are they, when
> A talk about trees is almost a crime
> Because it implies silence about
> so many horrors?'[32]

17 In 1938, Vertov's *Three Songs about Lenin* was completely re-edited for the Lenin memorials. New documents were inserted, but images of people who had fallen out of favor with the regime were also removed. Thus, 'pictures of Nikolai Yezhov, Nikita Khrushchev, Georgi Dimitrov, Nikolai Shvernik, and even Lenin at the Second Congress of the Communist International' were eliminated, while a speech by Stalin was added, as were seven hundred meters of footage at the end of the film showing Stalin's continuation of Lenin's policies.[33] This treatment of images was a widespread policy under Stalin. In the Stalinist purges, the visual traces of those who had fallen out of favor were systematically expunged. On negatives and prints, they were erased, retouched out of existence, or blacked out. The photographs were even required to vanish from private photo albums; owning them could be extremely dangerous and result in prosecution.[34]

18 After Stalin's death, Nikita Khrushchev, whose image had also been cut out of Vertov's film, became the first secretary of the Communist Party and then head of state in 1958. The Twentieth Party Congress of the CPSU in 1956, at which Khrushchev harshly criticized Stalin's cult of personality, marked the beginning of de-Stalinization. One year later, Mikhail Kalatozov released his film *The Cranes Are Flying*, which received the Golden Palm at the Cannes Film Festival.[35] The film became famous for its subtle use of the mobile camera, but it opens with a cinematic homage to the visual language of the 'new vision.' A shot from a bridge looking down at the two lovers, Veronika and Boris, exactly echoes the new vantage points that Rodchenko had sought to popularize, as does the extreme displacement of the vanishing point in other shots. As Oksana Bulgakova has shown, however, here they are not used subjectively but in order to produce, through 'sophisticated techniques for creating visual uncertainty,'[36] a visual expression of the disorientation, hesitation, and aimless wandering of the protagonist, and to translate these into images that will also destabilize the viewer.

19 Rodchenko's photographs of pine trees also appear as a visual citation in *The Cranes Are Flying* (*fig. 8*), and they come right in the middle of the film, which is constructed symmetrically like Vertov's *Three Songs about Lenin*. Except that in place of Lenin – whose image formed the center of Vertov's prologue – there is Boris (and the trees), or more precisely his death at the front. This is not a political hagiography conveyed through the use of a politics of the image, but rather a critique – a new revolution in thinking that here, once again, is staged and implemented visually. And in doing so, Kalatozov seems to cite Rodchenko and Vertov simultaneously, incorporating both the citation of Rodchenko's image and the symmetrical structure of its deployment in Vertov's film. *The Cranes Are Flying* opens with cranes in the sky above Moscow, and it ends with them as well. In the middle is the death of Boris, who looks up at the trees (in this instance, birches) as he falls – and the image of the treetops literally starts to spin and dissolves into other images (*fig. 9*): an imagined wedding and memories and quoted images from elsewhere in the film. The fallen Boris's gaze up at the trees constitutes the center around

which the film itself literally turns, a melodrama that opens with the beginning of the love story and ends with the arrival of the soldiers returning from the front. In between, there unfolds a story of love and renunciation, doubt and trust, war and destruction, wrong decisions and their correction. And such a correction – now political – makes the shot in the middle of the film legible.[37] The trees seem to speak, or they invite us into a conversation.

NOTES

1. Alexander RODCHENKO, *Fragment einer Vorlesung über Fotografie*, manuscript, V.A. Rodchenko Collection, quoted in Aleksandr LAVRENTJEV, 'Die neue Art, die Welt zu sehen,' foreword to *Rodčenko Fotografien*, by Hubertus GASSNER (Munich: Schirmer/Mosel, 1982), 8. My thanks to Schamma Schahadat for her indispensable comments.

2. Peter NOEVER, ed., *Alexander M. Rodtschenko/Warwara F. Stepanowa* (Munich: Prestel Publishers, 1991), 240.

3. Aleksandr RODCHENKO, 'LEF Notebook,' in *Aleksandr Rodchenko: Experiments for the Future: Diaries, Essays, Letters, and Other Writings*, ed. Alexander N. LAVRENTIEV, trans. Jamey GAMBRELL, 199 (New York: MOMA, 2005).

4. See Hubertus GASSNER, *Rodčenko Fotografien* (note 1), 92: 'The bare trunks seem to offer themselves up for industrial processing ... Like nature as a whole, trees too are seen from the perspective of the domination of nature.'

5. Thus, it isn't surprising that Rodchenko later returned to the tree motif in the context of the industrial use of trees. His first film, made in the late 1920s, is entitled *The Chemicalization of the Forest.* In 1931 he took a series of photographs at a sawmill, and in 1936 he worked on a photo-essay on logging for the journal *USSR under Construction*.

6. No. 6, 1927. A selection of the pine tree photographs is included in virtually every illustrated book about Rodchenko. See for example *Rodtschenko, Fotograf, 1891–1956. Bilder aus dem Moskauer Familienbesitz* (Göttingen: Arkana Verlag, 1989), 46 ff. One of the photographs of pine trees was also shown in Stuttgart at the famous *FiFo* exhibition in 1929.

7. See Aleksandr LAVRENTJEV, 'Die neue Art, die Welt zu sehen' (note 1), 7.

8. Unfortunately, it isn't possible to explore the extremely interesting details of this debate within the framework of this essay. For more information, see Szymon BOIKO, 'Die Kontroverse über Rodchenko als Fotograf,' in *Alexander Rodtschenko. Fotografie 1920–1938,* ed. Evelyn WEISS, 42–62 (Cologne: Wienand Verlag, 1978). The debate itself is documented in *Photography in the Modern Era: European Documents and Critical Writings, 1913–1940*, ed. Christopher PHILLIPS, 243–72 (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art/Aperture, 1989); *Sowjetische Photographie 1928–1932*, Rosalinde SARTORI and Henning ROGGE, 101–126 (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1975); and *Theorie der Fotografie II. 1912–1945*, ed. Wolfgang Kemp, 79–93 (Munich: Schirmer/Mosel, 1979). An unpublished draft can be found in *Rodtschenko, Fotograf* (note 6), 62.

9. Alexander RODTSCHENKO, 'Offene Unkenntnis oder gemeiner Trick?,' in *Theorie der Fotografie II,* ed. Wolfgang KEMP (Munich: Schirmer/Mosel, 1979), 83. [This quotation is omitted from the published English translation referenced in note 12 – translator's note.]

10. See Peter GALASSI, 'Rodchenko and Photography's Revolution,' in *Aleksandr Rodchenko,* ed. Magdalena DABROWSKI et al. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art/Harry N. Abrams, 1998), 129.

11. See Alexander LAWRENTJEW, 'Die Photo-Träume der Avantgarde,' in *Russische Photographie 1840–1940,* ed. David ELLIOT, 64 ff (Berlin: Ars Nicolai, 1993).

12. Aleksandr RODCHENKO, 'Large-Scale Illiteracy or Dirty Little Tricks: Open Letter,' in *Aleksandr Rodchenko: Experiments for the Future* (note 3), 206. [Only the first sentence of the passage is included in this published English translation. I have translated the rest of it from the German in the original of this essay, which comes from Alexander RODTSCHENKO, 'Offene Unkenntnis oder gemeiner Trick?' (note 9), 83. – translator's note]

13. *Novy LEF,* Moscow 1928, no. 3: 1929.

14. German KARGINOW, *Rodschenko* (Budapest: Corvina, 1979), 226.

15. See Karl EIMERMACHER, 'Die sowjetische Kulturpolitik,' in *Dokumente zur sowjetischen Kulturpolitik 1917–32,* ed. K. EIMERMACHER, 13–71 (Stuttgart/Berlin/Cologne/Mayence: W. Kohlhammer, 1972).

16. Dziga VERTOV, *Tagebücher/Arbeitshefte*, ed. Thomas TODE and Alexandra GRAMATKE (Konstanz: UVK, 2000), 28.

17. Annette MICHELSON, 'The Kinetic Icon in the Work of Mourning: Prolegomena to the Analysis of a Textual System,' *October* (Spring, 1990), 52: 18.

18. Ibid., 61.

19. Dziga VERTOV, 'Without Words,' in *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov,* ed. Annette MICHELSON, trans. Kevin O'BRIEN, 117–119 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); also *Tagebücher/ Arbeitshefte* (note 16), 29 ff.

20. Vertov also made use of material of his own that he had already employed for *Kino-Pravda,* which was the primary focus of his work between 1922 and 1925. In this sense, *Three Songs about Lenin* is very much typical of his work, since he was almost constantly returning to particular shots and reusing them in new contexts. In February 1924, for example – ten years before *Three Songs* – he made a documentary about Lenin's funeral and promptly used material from it in several other films.

21. VERTOV also characterizes the film in this way in his essay '*Drei Lieder über Lenin.* Literarischer Entwurf,' in *Schriften zum Film* (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1973), 132–7.

22. Dziga VERTOV, 'Without Words' (note 19), 118.

23. Ibid.

24. In addition to psychophysics, Lev Tolstoy's theory of contagion, which was widely popular at the beginning of the twentieth century, plays an important role here as well. See Sylvia SASSE, 'Moralische Infektion. Lev Tolstojs Theorie der Ansteckung und die Symptome der Leser,' in *Ansteckung. Zur Körperlichkeit eines ästhetischen Prinzips,* ed. Erika FISCHER-LICHTE, Mirjam SCHAUB, and Nicola SUTHOR, 275–93 (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2005).

25. For detailed discussions of this phenomenon, see Margarete VÖHRINGER and Michael HAGNER, "Vsevolod Pudovkins 'Mechanik des Gehirns – Film als psychophysisches Experiment,'" in *Der Geist bei der Arbeit. Historische Untersuchungen zur Hirnforschung*, Michael HAGNER, 124–42 (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2006); and Bernd STIEGLER, 'Film als Menschenexperiment: Dziga Vertovs *Enthusiasmus. Donbass Symphonie* (1930),' in *Mr. Münsterberg und Dr. Hyde. Zur Kinematographie des Menschenexperiments*, ed. Marcus KRAUSE and Nicolas PETHES, 131–51 (Bielefeld: transcript, 2007).

26. VERTOV, 'Without Words' (note 19), 118.

27. VERTOV, *Tagebücher/Arbeitshefte* (note 16), 56.

28. On Lenin and cinema, see Günther DAHLKE and Lilli KAUFMANN, eds., *LENIN über den Film. Dokumente und Materialien* (Munich: Verlag Rogner & Bernhard, 1971).

29. GASSNER, *Rodčenko Fotografien* (note 1), 68.

30. ‘Of all works of art,’ writes Peter Galassi, ‘Vertov’s films of the mid- and late 1920s are perhaps closest in spirit to Rodchenko’s photography of the same period.’ Peter GALASSSI, ‘Rodchenko and Photography’s Revolution’ (note 10), 123. On Vertov and Rodchenko, see also GASSNER, *Rodčenko Fotografien* (note 1), 20–23 and 68 ff.; and Selim O. KHAN-MAGOMEDOV, *Rodchenko: The Complete Work* (Milan: Idea Books Edizioni, 1986), 214 ff.

31. This photograph is also reproduced in Günther DAHLKE und Lilli KAUFMANN, eds., *LENIN über den Film* (note 28), fig. 67. Also contained in that book are photographs (figs. 65 and 66) in which Lenin is shown sitting on the same park bench with others (here N. K. Krupskaya and M. I. Ulyanova). The film’s presentation of the photograph is thus at the same time a metaphorical invitation to take the empty place beside him.

32. Bertolt BRECHT, ‘To Those Born Later,’ in *Poems,* ed. John WILLETT and Ralph MANNHEIM, 318 (London: Methuen, 1976).

33. VERTOV, *Tagebücher/Arbeitshefte* (note 16), 235.

34. See Nicola HILLE, ‘Die sowjetischen Fotoretuschen der 30er Jahre als politische Demozide. Einige Ausführungen zu den historischen und politischen Hintergründen der Bildmanipulation im Stalinismus,’ in *Fotografie und Geschichte. Timm Starl zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. Dieter MAYER-GÜRR, 68–102 (Marburg: Jonas Verlag, 2000); as well as the comprehensive study by David KING, *The Commissar Vanishes. The Falsification of Photographs and Art in Stalin’s Russia* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1997).

35. My heartfelt thanks to Joachim Paech for pointing this film out to me.

36. Christine ENGEL, ed., *Geschichte des sowjetischen und russischen Films* (Stuttgart/Weimar: Metzler, 1981), 121. This film is discussed on pp. 118–122.

37. It is tempting to continue the list of relevant films, but it isn’t possible to do so within the framework of this essay. There are similar shots in René CLAIR’s *Entr’acte* (my thanks to Lea Heim for pointing this out) and KUROSAWA’s *Rashomon,* to mention only two.

ABSTRACTS

When the Russian artist and photographer Alexander Rodchenko was accused of plagiarism and formalism in an anonymous article in 1928, it was clear that his very existence was at stake. In 1920s Russia, an accusation like this had the sole goal of causing political disgrace. Among the examples chosen to illustrate this charge was one of Rodchenko’s photographs of pine trees. There followed a heated public debate, which revolved around nothing less than the function of art. This controversy was so well known that any subsequent use of Rodchenko’s perspective must be interpret-ed as more than a mere citation – it must be seen as a political commentary. In other words, what is at issue is the politics of images under Stalinism. Now, it is interesting to note that there are two films, in particular, in which shots of pine trees taken from Rodchenko’s perspective are employed at prominent points: Dziga Vertov’s *Three Songs about Lenin* and Mikhail Kalatozov’s *The Cranes Are Flying.* The transformation of a photograph into a cinematic image brings an entire politics of images along with it.

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Bernd Stiegler has been a professor of German literature at the University of Konstanz in Germany since fall 2007. His focus is on the twentieth century in the context of the media. From 1999 to 2007, he was editorial director for Suhrkamp's Wissenschaft series. He is the author of numerous publications on the history and theory of photography, media studies, and nineteenth- and twentieth-century German and French literature.